Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board,

My name is Colijia Feliz, I am here as a community member who graduated from Redwood, and continues to work here within the education system. I have family members who are currently students of VUSD, so I have an invested interest in their education. I am here to speak in support of the ethnic studies program being piloted and reject the ridiculous controversy over the book: A Different Mirror, a History of Multicultural America by Ronald Takaki. An alternate perspective is lacking that books like this one are needed and urge you to refrain from giving too much attention and energy to one perspective that is not representative of the diverse community we live in. That one voice is not connected to our youth and does not speak for the youth.

The book A Different Mirror, gives accurate and truthful accounting of our history here in America, a truth that has been kept from our youth for decades in Visalia Unified and across America. Striving to have this book removed or prevented from being studied by students is an effort to keep them ignorant of the truth. It appears an individual Mr. Jensen, wants students only to hear a particular version of history that is based on white privilege and white supremacy, one he learned over 60 years ago when Jim Crow laws were active, laws were separate but never equal, and use of the N-word was legal and an everyday occurrence. Some in this community would like our students to memorialize, celebrate, and continue learning that people like Christopher Columbus are heroes, when he was in fact, a rapist, and responsible for the massacre of entire populations of Indigenous people, and is given credit for discovering America where people had already existed for generations. He no more discovered this country than I could go to either one of your homes and discover it right now. This is the only edited version of history that he and others would have us all believe. Unfortunately, it is saddening the board seems happy to oblige that privileged and bigoted concept of history. Removing this book, would be preventing students from the truth and an adequate education. This would continue to follow in the footsteps of history in promoting racial injustice and silencing the voices of people of color.

The suggestion that this book does not represent the history or "the America" Mr. Jensen knows and remembers, is a perspective based on one person who reaped the benefits of privilege and is now threatened due to a fragile ego that anyone dare to have a different or version of history. I graduated from Redwood without the knowledge of this country's true history. I did not learn about many things that people of color endured until I reached higher education. Ancestors and relatives, instead of by our education system, primarily pass down the little education people of color do learn about this country's true history. This is disappointing, as it is the job of our education system to give this knowledge. We cannot commit to continuing to send our youth into college and the adult world ignorant of the multicultural voice or how to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. Removing this book would do exactly that. The entire point of history is to learn from the mistakes made in the past and strive not to continue making those same mistakes. However, the students of VUSD cannot be free of those mistakes, especially if you listen to the community member and others like him who want to remove this book. This agenda seeks to keep our youth blind and ignorant of truth.

Communities and people of color have overcome disgusting injustices in this country, but have proven themselves to be truly resilient. Our youth should know this, and they should know the negative aspects as well as the few positives, which have brought us to where we are today. The Black and African-American population are more than the few tributes given to Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Obama. If we are honest about these two amazing men, we must also acknowledge the extreme racism

and resistance they were met with while attempting to make advancements for racial equality. Many like to quote Martin Luther King Jr. for his civil obedience and messages of peace. Many who have supported a white supremacist agenda quote him. As we saw, many of them in our government quoted him on his recent holiday but many of those individuals also supported the racist insurrection at the capital, which are two polarizing situations and perspectives. Those who stormed the capital are perhaps people who share the same ideals of not wanting people of color to have a voice and fight to prevent change, that is also what is happening here. They are also people who have bought into the false and edited versions of history that are based on white privilege and white supremacy. Without wanting to acknowledge the true injustices that have been committed against people of color. We cannot forget that Martin Luther King, Jr. was hated for bringing hope to the Black community and for organizing them. He and many others were beaten, incarcerated, attacked by dogs, etc. while peacefully protesting. Much like the treatment, we saw received by peaceful protestors in this country 6 months ago. This is another example of how many have not learned from our history, or perhaps, never learned it. This is why it is needed, because the same mistakes and atrocities continue to happen. Martin Luther King, Jr. died one of the most hated men in America. He was targeted in every step of his fight and efforts toward racial justice; the majority did not appreciate him at his time of death. People of color are still struggling to overcome the aftereffects of racial and social injustices committed against them. It is astounding that this overhaul review of the book is happening based on one person's complaint and I am sure subsequent complaints after. I am positive it took several staff, students, and parents to advocate for this program to be instated in the first place. It does not make sense that it took that, gained approval, and now a few complaints can undo all of that work. I am a person who believes in seeing the bright side of things and finding the positive, and I can find the positive in this situation. I do not agree with Mr. Jensen's opinion and those like his, because he is wrong. I can however, thank him that he is contributing to many in the community and members of the board to receive an enlightened education that they may not have had previously. So thank you Mr. Jensen for starting a study of this book and contributing to the education of our community. Those of you on the board, if you say you value the truth, then you should value the truth and details of this book.

Thank you,

Colijia Feliz, LCSW

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